

VZCZCXRO1922  
PP RUEHCI  
DE RUEHKT #0809/01 1101240  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 201240Z APR 07  
FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5675  
INFO RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5263  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1157  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 5940  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5643  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 3960  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1332  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0378  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0274  
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY 0343  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0200  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 3390  
RHMFISS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1617  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2618

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 000809

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2017  
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BT](#) [IN](#) [NP](#)  
SUBJECT: CORE GROUP MEETS WITH FOREIGN MINISTER ON  
BHUTANESE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

REF: KATHMANDU 755

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty for reasons 1.4(b/d).

Summary

-----  
11. (C) In a meeting April 20 with Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan, members of the Core Group representing the U.S., Australia, Canada, Denmark and Norway laid out the basis for technical discussions on third-country resettlement of Bhutanese refugees. FM Pradhan emphasized the need to repatriate at least some refugees to Bhutan, but ultimately committed to moving forward simultaneously with a resettlement program. She expressed concern that a residual population of refugees, who either were uninterested or unable to resettle abroad, would be left behind. All the Core Group participants agreed to continue to press the Royal Government of Bhutan to allow eligible refugees to repatriate.

Core Group Chair Briefs FM Pradhan on Activities  
-----

12. (C) Representatives of the Core Group met April 20 with Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan, Acting Foreign Secretary Gyan Chandra Acharya and other Foreign and Home Ministry officials to reconfirm the Government of Nepal's (GON) commitment to proceed with third-country resettlement. Ambassador Moriarty and RefCoord attended the meeting along with Core Group Chairman and Australian Ambassador Graeme Lade, Norwegian Ambassador Tore Toreng, Danish Ambassador Finn Thilsted, and Canadian Cooperation Office Director Ed Doe. Lade told FM Pradhan that the Core Group had become energized roughly two years ago because of growing concern that resolution of the Bhutanese refugee situation was no closer than when the problem began 16 years ago. Donor fatigue had begun to set in, he added. Lade acknowledged Nepal's contributions, particularly in conducting the census and providing exit permits for vulnerable cases. He welcomed Prime Minister Koirala's agreement, provided to the U.S. Ambassador, to proceed with third-country resettlement. The

Core Group would continue to urge the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) to repatriate eligible refugees and to ensure respect for the rights of Nepali ethnic groups living in Bhutan, but would like to see repatriation and resettlement proceed simultaneously. "We want the refugees to know there is a light at the end of the tunnel," he concluded.

#### Bhutan Is Not Planning on Repatriation

-----

¶3. (C) Ambassadors Toreng and Thilsted noted that Bhutan's reaction at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit in New Delhi and to the Danish demarche delivered in Thimpu in March had indicated that the RGOB was not genuinely considering repatriation of the refugees. Thilsted questioned whether the refugees themselves still had an interest in returning to Bhutan considering that the RGOB had not changed its attitude toward ethnic Nepali groups.

#### Nepal Wants Continued Push for Repatriation

-----

¶4. (C) The Foreign Minister agreed that the situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal was a very serious and long-standing problem that needed to be addressed. The GON's first priority was to repatriate at least those refugees who were forcibly evicted from Bhutan. On the other hand, she said, if the Bhutanese refugees wanted to resettle to a third country, they could. Pradhan worried, however, that repatriation would never happen if resettlement moved forward now. When the Bhutanese Foreign Minister had indicated in

KATHMANDU 00000809 002 OF 003

New Delhi that Bhutan was too busy constructing democracy to discuss the refugees, Pradhan had questioned the validity of democracy in Bhutan if Bhutanese citizens remained outside the country, excluded from the process. Resettlement was a secondary solution, Pradhan concluded.

#### Comprehensive Solution Needs To Include Residual Population

-----

¶5. (C) The Foreign Minister appreciated the U.S. offer to accept 60,000 refugees with perhaps another 10,000 refugees to be resettled in other countries. "But what about the other 35,000 refugees?" she asked. FM Pradhan said that the Government of India (GOI) had agreed at the SAARC Summit to "think about" the problem of a residual refugee population. Acting Foreign Secretary Acharya suggested that Nepal, Bhutan and the international community needed to view the issue in its entirety and focus on a comprehensive solution that met the needs of all the refugees. He feared that the RGOB would regard third-country resettlement as a comprehensive solution when it was not. Acharya said not all refugees would be able to participate in or be interested in resettlement. Nepal needed to find a way to repatriate those who wanted to return home. Acharya hoped the Core Group would continue to help Nepal push Bhutan on this issue. Ambassador Lade acknowledged that a residual population could remain, but he believed the number would be small. FM Pradhan replied that the refugee issue was truly Bhutan's problem and Bhutan needed to accept responsibility. Resettlement was a good solution, she added, but not the only solution. Lade agreed and said that the Core Group was determined not to allow the RGOB off the hook. Ambassador Moriarty also agreed that the Core Group would continue to press Bhutan on repatriation, but he did not believe that the RGOB, after sixteen years, had any intention of repatriating the refugees. The Ambassador suggested that, if Nepal were to tie resettlement to progress on repatriation, then no refugee would see a solution to their problem.

#### A Second Wave of Expulsions?

-----

16. (C) Secretary Acharya worried, however, that third-country resettlement could result in a second wave of expulsions from Bhutan. Danish Ambassador Thilsted noted that his government had raised this concern with the RGOB, which had indicated further expulsions would not happen. Thilsted suggested that the donor community would not continue funding assistance to the refugees forever and urged Nepal to move ahead now with resettlement. Acharya again said that the offer of resettlement was positive, but that not all the refugees would be able to resettle. He stated that the GON needed to discuss this further.

#### The Prime Minister Gave His Commitment

-----

17. (C) Ambassador Moriarty said forcefully that Prime Minister Koirala had committed on three separate occasions, most recently on April 13, to allow third-country resettlement to proceed. On that basis, he said, the U.S. was choosing an implementing partner that would set up a processing center in Kathmandu in July and begin processing cases in September. The Ambassador asked whether the GON bureaucracy was suggesting that it would not implement the PM's commitment. Ambassador Thilsted said that his understanding of the PM's commitment was the same. The Foreign Minister replied that Nepal only wanted assurances that the Core Group would continue to press for repatriation while pursuing resettlement. The Ambassador agreed.

#### The Way Forward

-----

KATHMANDU 00000809 003 OF 003

18. (C) Ambassador Moriarty suggested that the focus should now be on discussing procedural and operational issues for resettlement. The U.S. wanted UNHCR to initiate an information campaign about resettlement in the refugee camps as soon as the census was finished. He noted that the U.S. would resettle the refugees in family groups and would not discriminate on the basis of age, gender or education. Certain exclusions would apply, such as specific communicable diseases or a criminal record. Secretary Acharya noted that the GON might soon request a ministerial meeting with the RGOB in Thimpu to push for a comprehensive solution. All of the Ambassadors agreed to continue to press the RGOB to repatriate eligible refugees, but in the meantime all wanted to initiate technical discussions on resettlement procedures and regulations. Ambassador Moriarty noted that a technical team from the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration would be on the ground the week of April 23 to begin this dialogue for the U.S.

#### Comment

-----

19. (C) Opposition within the Foreign Ministry to third-country resettlement is unsurprising considering that a series of Foreign Ministers have tried repeatedly since the 1990s, without success, to hold Bhutan accountable for its actions. The GON is rightfully concerned about finding a solution for those refugees who are either not able to participate, or not interested, in resettlement. It is also only appropriate that Foreign Minister Pradhan is pressing the Core Group to keep pushing Bhutan on repatriation. But now is the time to start preparing for something that Nepal and the donors can accomplish, namely resettlement. With the Foreign Ministry's agreement to initiate technical discussions on resettlement, we look forward to PRM's visit next week.  
MORIARTY